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THE NAVY AND THE EMPIRE.
BY
W. LAIRD CLOWES
(Author of "The Royal Navy," &c.)

II.

THE TRIUMPHS OF THE NAVY.

Great have been the triumphs of the British Navy in the past. I am not sure, however, that we do not commonly exaggerate the quality of some of those triumphs, and so fill ourselves with false estimates of what can be accomplished by British valour. It is almost impossible, I admit, to exaggerate the qualities of a few of our most single successes at sea, but there are many others which we have accustomed ourselves to look at through a magnifying medium, with the result that we are inclined, even in these days of travel and education, to overrate our prowess, and to underrate the bravery and ability of our possible foes.

Let us take, for example, the case of the capture of Gibraltar, in 1704, by the combined British and Dutch fleets, under Sir George Rooke. Rooke detached twenty-two ships of the line, besides bomb-vessels, to attack the seaward works of the fortress, and employed a landing party of eighteen hundred Marines. I grant that the natural strength of the Rock was then, as now, enormous, and that it mounted a great many guns; but, seeing that its garrison, according to the most liberal estimate, did not exceed a hundred and fifty men, and that, according to Byng, who was present, there were no more than eighty defenders in the place, it is, I think, reasonable to say that the glory of the affair remained rather with the defenders than with the attackers, for the gallant Spaniards did not surrender until after 15,000 shots had been fired at the fortress.

INSTRUCTIVE VICTORIES.

Let us take again the case of Byng's victory off Cape Passaro, on August 11th, 1718. Excluding small craft, the Spaniards had but twelve ships, mounting fifty guns and upwards. Byng had twenty-one. He practically destroyed Castaneta's fleet, yet, though we rank the battle among our naval triumphs, we must carefully recollect that, in such circumstances, any victory short of a very complete one would have been little less than disgraceful. A similar verdict ought to be passed in the case of Anson's victory over M. de La Jonquiere in 1747. Anson had fourteen ships of fifty guns and upwards. The French had but four. The whole of the hostile force was captured; but, surely, no great triumph was won. So with regard to Hawke's victory off Brest over M. de l'Etendard in the course of the same year. We had fourteen ships ranking as of the line. The French had only nine. It would be a subject for surprise if Hawke had failed to take seven of the enemy, seeing that the French were hampered by the presence with them of an enormous convoy of great value. The triumph would have been north talking about had this most valuable convoy been also captured; but the fact is that it escaped bodily, much to the credit of the French commander.

I have not yet done with my list of what may be called overrated British naval triumphs; for I want to direct attention to the fact that a very large proportion of our most famous successes were won, not against superior forces by any inherent superiority of British pluck and muscle, but mainly by sheer weight of numbers. All glory to the administrations which gave us that overwhelming weight of numbers; all glory, too, to the men who fought in Britain's quarrels; but let us not make the mistake of attributing some of our most instructive victories to causes which had but little to do with the results.

Hawke's victory over Marshal Comflans in Quiberon Bay in 1759, though it was gained by a slightly superior force, does not rank among the overrated triumphs. It was fought in a gale of wind, and in narrow and dangerous waters. Few seamen besides Hawke would have dared to attempt what he attempted; and it is impossible to deny him the highest honour for his action. But Boscawen's victory off Lagos, over M. de La Clue, in the same year, was another success of the overrated sort. He had fifteen ships ranking as of the line; the French had but twelve, and, even of these, five parted company just before the fight. Boscawen himself said of the battle, "It is well, but it might have been a great deal better," and so indeed it might. Five French ships were taken or destroyed; two, nevertheless, managed to escape.

Similarly overrated is Rodney's victory over Don Juan de Langara, off Cape St. Vincent, in 1780. The Spaniards had eleven sail of the line; Rodney had twenty-one; and it is not to be wondered at that only four of the enemy's vessels got away. It was, however, no strikingly brilliant victory.

On the occasion of Bridport's so-called victory off Groix, in 1795, we had fourteen ships of the line to our opponents' eleven; and our numerical superiority in guns was, in proportion, much greater; but we captured three vessels only, and Bridport's omission to do more has earned for him the very severe strictures of the best critics. Corresponding, or even worse lack of energy, was displayed later in the same year by Hotham off Hyeres. We had twenty-three ships of the line; the French no more than seventeen; yet Hotham, in what James calls "this miserable action," contented himself with the capture of a single 74-gun ship, and then with regarding the affair as a victory. Unhappily the authorities so far agreed with him that a couple of years later they rewarded him with an Irish peerage.

Even Duncan's celebrated victory on Camperdown in 1797 was won against an inferior force. We placed sixteen ships in the line. The Dutch had a like number; but to make it up, they had to introduce a 44-gun vessel, and our vessels had a preponderance of more than ninety guns in their favour. On that day, however, our victory was decisive, for nine ships of the Dutch line, besides frigates, were taken, after one of the best fought fights in history. It is interesting to recall at the present time that the Dutch were among the stoutest antagonists we ever encountered in the old wars, and that they always needed more beating than the French or Spaniards. Had our not been a little the stronger side, as regards guns and material, at Camperdown, the result might easily have been different.

Duckworth's defeat of M. Leissouzes off Can Dom ago, in 1805, left nothing to be desired on the score of completeness, for the French squadron simply came to exist as a hostile force. Duckworth, however, disposed of seven ships of the line to the French five; and, had his force been much less thorough than it was, he would have been almost disgraced.

REAL TRIUMPHS.

I do not need attention to these facts with any desire to depreciate our triumphs, even when they have been won at the expense of foes who were obviously at a great numerical disadvantage. My only object is to put them in proper perspective, and to show that many victories on which we commonly place ourselves were, in fact, actions which were decided rather by mere numbers than by any less brute factor. Having said that much, it is but fair that I should say a few words of some other

actions which, in spite of our numerical inferiority, resulted in victory for England. These are the real triumphs of the British navy. One of the most interesting—because it witnessed the first successful employment in modern times of the manoeuvre of breaking the enemy's line—was Rodney's defeat of de Grasse, off Martinique, in 1781. The fleets were not unequally matched, for if Rodney had one more ship of the line than his opponent, the French disposed of the greater number of guns and had the heavier vessels. In the action, and the subsequent languid pursuit, five ships of the line were taken. Had an order been given for a general chase after the foe had been thrown into confusion, "I am confident," wrote Hood, "we should have had twenty sail of the enemy's ships before dark."

Hove's victory of "the Glorious First of June," 1794, affords another example of a great success, won against a superior force, but not finally pressed to its logical conclusion. Howe had twenty-five sail of the line: M. Villaret Joyeuse had one more. Six French ships were taken and one, the *Pengue*, was sunk. That worse did not happen was largely due to the tactical ability of Villaret. The French navy of those days had not got over the damage which had been done to its prestige and discipline by the first excesses of the Revolution. Most of its old and tried officers had been removed from command; and many of the seamen were inexperienced; so that, although we did undoubtedly inflict a crushing defeat upon numerically superior forces of the enemy, it can scarcely be pretended that our opponents were, man for man, on equal terms with us. A corresponding deduction must be made from the glory which we won in February, 1797, when Jarvis so badly beat Don José de Cordova off Cape St. Vincent. We had but fifteen ships of the line, and the Spaniards had twenty-seven; yet we carried off four. The Spaniards, however, were a mob of ships and men, most of their craft being manned by soldiers and landmen. It is not at all surprising that the highly disciplined British had their own way that day.

It was not until Nelson attained command of a fleet that we learnt what it was to defeat a really formidable and worthy foe of superior force, in a great pitched battle. Nelson, showed his countrymen how to do it at the Nile, in 1798. He had fourteen ships ranking as of the line, but one of them was unable to take part in the battle. M. Brueys had thirteen larger ships of the line and four good frigates with the advantages of what might have been thought an impregnable position, shore batteries to support him, and plenty of time for preparation. Of the French ships of the line nine were taken and two burnt. It was the completest victory that had up to that time been won by us. Yet very much greater was the disproportion of force, and as crushing the victory, at Trafalgar. The allies had thirty-three sail of the line, and we only twenty-seven; but I need hardly remind the reader that nineteen of the enemy were taken, though some were retained during the bad weather that followed, and many more were wrecked or hid to be destroyed.

SINGLE SHIP ACTIONS.

In single-ship actions, as in general engagements, it has been the rule, rather than the exception, for the victorious British vessel to be of superior force to her vanquished enemy. This rule is particularly noticeable as applying to the duels fought in the war of 1778-83, when the French navy was probably at its best. It does not appear that during these years there was so much as a single case of a French man-of-war sinking to a British ship of inferior broadside. British vessels of inferior force did on two occasions capture American vessels; but, of those vessels, one was surprised, and the other was badly manned; and, in addition, the American navy of those early days was so young and inexperienced as to be quite unfit to meet a British opponent on anything like equal terms. There were more exceptions in the war of 1793-1802, when the French navy, suffering from the disorganization of the Revolution, and had lost many of its best officers, Mr. H. W. Wilson's analysis, started in the fourth volume of my "Royal Navy," shows that, taking 83 single-ship actions, 28 were won by the vessel of superior broadside, and 10 by the vessel of inferior force. In one case, however, that of the *Ambascade* and *Bayonnaise*, the winning inferior craft was a Frenchman; and in three cases where a Frenchman stuck to an inferior British opponent, there were other British ships at hand; so that we may easily blame ourselves too much upon the traditional capacity of any British sailor to deal with "two greasy Frenchmen." At the same time, there were great and striking triumphs of single ships during that war, and it is much to be regretted that the Admiralty has not seen fit, by naming modern vessels after them, to commemorate the extraordinary gallantry and success of Feakiner who, in the *Blanche*, captured the *Pique*; of Cook, who, in the *Sibylle*, took the *Fort*; of Bowen, who, in the *Terpsichore*, took the *Vestale*; and of Martin, who, in the *St. Marguerite*, took the *Tamise*. If we possessed a cruiser called, say, the *Bowen*, people might be anxious to know what the name meant, and might thus learn something of the deeds of one of the bravest fellows who ever lived, Richard Bowen, the hero of Tonierfe.

We have done marvelously well, too, against heavy odds in certain cutting-out affairs, in spite of the fact that we have sometimes crushed our foes even when they have been on paper, much stronger than ourselves, such successes have been exceptional; and that most of our great naval victories and single-ship successes have been won by brute force, aided of course by adequate leadership. We cannot, therefore, safely trust to anything but numerical superiority in the future, though, now and then, perhaps, a naval genius may steal a success from the "bigger battalions." Look as I shall try to demonstrate, has often strangely befriended us; but it would be the worst folly to deliberately count upon it.

It is not necessary to pursue these points any further. I consider that I have shown that, in spite of the fact that we have sometimes crushed our foes even when they have been on paper, much stronger than ourselves, such successes have been exceptional; and that most of our great naval victories and single-ship successes have been won by brute force, aided of course by adequate leadership. We cannot, therefore, safely trust to anything but numerical superiority in the future, though, now and then, perhaps, a naval genius may steal a success from the "bigger battalions." Look as I shall try to demonstrate, has often strangely befriended us; but it would be the worst folly to deliberately count upon it.

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MACAO.

[FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.]

MACAO, 11th May.
The arms-dealers of this colony are very busily engaged again in pressing upon the Government their petition that the Government Council here should request the authorities at your port to allow exportation of arms to Macao. The honourable members of the Government Council are too serious to permit the illicit trade to be carried on during the time of their administration. The public in general knows that the business of arms is not a genuine and honest one. It is, however, a pleasure to be able to say that the principal or only culprit in this matter, to whom it was owing that arms were imported and exported in such great quantities, has now gone and will return no more, leaving it to the Council to make up for the past. It is gratifying too to be able to say that the members of the Government Council know what to do, and at least it is a case of "better late than never." The reason why I call the arms business (only in this colony) an illicit one is easy to explain. The so-called arms-dealers who import most into this colony have not got an open door, and arms whether imported or exported do not pass under the name of the firm; the business is done by means of a kind of broker. Yet if the business were a fair one, why should it not be carried on openly? Much more, they pay about \$30 yearly for their licence. It is hard to believe, but it is true that they are promising to any person who can get them permission to export arms from Hongkong to this colony fifty cents on every weapon, whereas about a year and a half ago it was twenty-five cents each. The expenses are very great, and I give a table which will furnish an approximate idea of them—

Shop licence for one year \$ 30
Cost of dealing in dangerous articles (say) 20

Arms as soon as they reach Macao must go to the Government depot (Camoes Grotto) and pay 10 cents each for a month or part of a month. If they arrive on the 30th of any month and go out on the 1st or 2nd of the next month, this counts two months and they have to pay 20 cents each. So that if a man deposits 1,000 arms, say for two days, he has to pay 100
Licences from the Government Office to bring the arms, to the depot, at one cent each, say on 1,000 rifles 10
Licences from the same office to take out the arms from the depot also at one cent each, say on 1,000 rifles 10
Commissions to brokers to get permission, at 20 cents (though they are now offering 50 cents) 250

Payment to smugglers and presents to some for non-interference with transports during dark nights, etc. ?
If this business is a fair one it could easily be prosecuted openly, and could be done by the dealer themselves, thus saving commission to brokers, etc., and a lot more money and trouble. The Government Council should stop this business altogether during the time their administration continues. When the time comes for a revolution in China the Government Council will then be able to say that they did not help the revolutionists by letting them have arms and ammunition either to fight their own Government or anyone else. No doubt twenty thousand or more firearms have been supplied, but that was in the past; for the future the authorities should must cut at the root of the matter.

The plague continues to bad that the Chinese community is now having recourse to right processions to the temples to pray for health. Some good may come of this, because these going about in the streets get fresh air, and secondly because just sticks and crackers are burning everywhere. But, nevertheless, the time has come to take the matter up properly, to spread the inhabitants in more houses and to do away with the houses in the dirtiest quarters of the city. If this is not done, we shall have the plague with us all the year round.

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JIUJHI SOTEDA, Esq., President.
Head Office Manager—TAKESHI DOKI, Esq.

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